



DOGS

** Hair Coat Shedding Related to Seasons **

While excessive hair shedding is a common complaint heard among pet owners, in most cases, the shedding is usually normal. An understanding of why dogs and cats lose their hair coat, and what causes shedding, goes a long way towards explaining why they shed hair all the time.

Dogs & cats do not grow hair continuously, but rather in cycles. Each cycle has a growing phase, a transitional phase and a resting phase. These hair cycles are controlled by such factors as nutrition, hormones, state of health, but most importantly, the amount of light (called photoperiod) and changes in the surrounding temperature. Dogs in northern latitudes tend to shed their hair coats twice a year, in the spring & fall, as the outside temperature and the amount of daylight changes. As the weather turns colder or warmer, and the period of daylight gets shorter or longer, the brain sends a message to the hair follicles to increase activity. Hair growth tends to be *maximal in summer* and *minimal in winter*. Pets that are kept primarily indoors tend to experience changes in both *temperature* (going in and out of the house) and *light* (artificial lights turned on and off) all year round. As a result, these pets tend to shed their hair, sometimes profusely, throughout the year.

If you suspect that your pet's hair loss is abnormal, you should consult your vet. If a thorough physical exam indicates that your pet is healthy, steps can be taken to minimize the effects of shredding. Diet is very important to the health of the skin and hair coat. Supplements such as cod liver oil are unnecessary if a complete and balanced diet is fed. If the diet is questionable, it is best to change over to one that is well-balanced. Nutritional supplements such as *omega fatty acids* can help reduce shedding if the cause of the shedding is related to a fatty acid deficiency.

Daily Brushing is good for the hair coat and will remove those hairs that would normally fall out. From a housekeeping point of view, it is better to have the hairs come out on the brush than around the house.

Frequency of Bathing and the type of shampoo used can also factor into the amount of shedding that occurs. Using a human-type shampoo, *for example*, can cause excessive shedding because these shampoos can be quite harsh to a pet's skin and perfumes can cause *hypersensitivity* reactions. Bathing too frequently can dry out the hair coat and cause excessive shedding.

Stress can also play a role in hair shedding. It is quite common for dogs and cats to start losing excessive amounts of hair.

